

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002033

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/NGA, NEA/PD, ECA
DOJ FOR BSWARTZ
DEPT PASS PRESIDENT'S SCIENCE ADVISOR/WJEFFREYS
DEPT PASS HOMELAND SECURITY FOR BICE/GARCIA
DEPT PASS TREASURY FOR U/S JOHN TAYLOR
PARIS FOR UNESCO MISSION

FROM ORHA/BAGHDAD -- J LIMBERT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: REPORTED LOSSES AT NORTHERN SITES: IN SEARCH OF
NIMROD'S GOLD

1. SUMMARY. U.S. forces have stopped the looting by tribal raiders at the Assyrian site at Nimrod, about 25 kilometers south of Mosul; but not before the raiders had made off with pieces of an eighth century B.C. stone relief. The Mosul museum has yet to inventory its losses, but during a 5/10 visit we found several Assyrian slabs taken, and both Hatrian and Islamic displays untouched. The Ninevah site, in Mosul town, lost several pieces of seventh century B.C. reliefs excavated recently by Italian teams. In a related series of events, ORHA has temporarily stopped an attempt by National Geographic photo team to have Iraq Central Bank vaults opened and to film "discovery" of Nimrod gold reportedly hidden there. END SUMMARY.

ASSYRIAN PIECES LOST FROM MOSUL MUSEUM

2. I accompanied Dr. Jaber Khalil, chief of the State Antiquities and Heritage Organization, on a trip to Mosul on 5/10/03 to visit the Mosul museum and the Assyrian sites at Ninevah (in Mosul town) and Nimrod (about 25 kilometers south). Dr. Menhal, the regional inspector of antiquities told us the museum staff was still making an inventory of losses. So far they had identified about 10 Assyrian pieces lost, mostly slabs from friezes. They believed the museum's Hatrian and Islamic collections are intact. They have yet to inventory the losses or damage from the museum storerooms. While the library and card catalogue appeared safe, the offices and laboratories were looted and vandalized - as happened at the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad. An older building of the museum remains under the control of a political party of no fixed address.

3. The state of the Mosul Museum's records remains uncertain. We asked Menhal to provide photos and descriptions of missing objects as soon as possible, so that we could get these items on a red list. In many cases, good photos may not be available, but we should be able to get at least a written description of the most important missing pieces.

MORE ASSYRIAN PIECES LOST AT NINEVAH AND NIMROD

4. At the extensive mound that is the ruin of Ninevah, we found evidence that thieves had gone after some of the reliefs recently excavated by Italian archeologists. Looters had attacked, perhaps with pick-axes, a section of wall and removed a slab measuring perhaps one foot by three feet.

5. At Nimrod, the magnificent ninth-eighth century B.C. Assyrian site about 25 kilometers south of Mosul, U.S. forces have been guarding the site for about seven days. They appeared after thieves from surrounding villages overcame the local guards and made off with two slabs of bas-relief, each measuring about 18 inches square. They had attempted without success to remove other pieces.

6. The U.S. Army lieutenant in charge of the detachment at Nimrod said that his unit had previously been guarding a looted and ruined sugar factory, and were gratified finally to be protecting something of value. Inspector Menhal and regional director of excavations M. Mozahem, added that only U.S. forces (or Iraqis from a different region) could guarantee security at Nimrod, because even armed Iraqi guards feared that killing or wounding an attacker would provoke a blood feud and put their (the guards') families in danger.

FINDING THE GOLD: POWER PLAY AND PUBLICITY STUNT

7. At Nimrod, we saw the site where in 1988 Iraqi archeologists discovered numerous gold objects - estimated weight from 70 to 300 kilograms -- from a woman's grave. Since their discovery, the objects were on display only once for a brief period in 1991-2. Mozahim told us he had last seen them at the Central Bank in 1998, when he was preparing

a book on the discovery.

18. The Nimrod gold and its fate remain controversial and divisive. Feeding the controversy is intense rivalry and factionalism within the Iraq State Antiquities Department, where the current director believes that his predecessor - who claims credit for the treasure's discovery in 1988 - is attempting to re-enter the Antiquities Department through the back door by encouraging a team from National Geographic to press for opening the vaults at the ruined Central Bank building and for exclusive rights to film the "discovery" of the treasure.

19. Working with ORHA colleagues, we have managed temporarily to stop this effort, which museum officials insist is unwise and is in reality a combination of well-financed publicity stunt and power play. Opening the Iraqi Central Bank vaults and exposing their contents at this time poses very difficult questions: Who can authorize opening the vaults? Who knows what their contents should be? Who will be accountable for lost or missing objects? And, who, on behalf of the non-existent Iraqi government, will be responsible for receiving and guaranteeing the security of the valuable objects purportedly stored in the vaults?

URBANCIC